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Carter Meeting With Brezhnev Set for June 15

Pact Signing in Vienna— Senators Open Debate

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WASHINGTON, May 10 — Senate leaders opened an informal debate today on the new strategic arms limitation treaty with the Soviet Union by stressing its importance and listing questions that they said had to be answered satisfactorily to insure ratification.

The treaty is to be signed by President Carter and Leonid I. Brezhnev, the Soviet leader, in Vienna on June 15, Administration officials said. A formal announcement is expected tomorrow. Vienna was also the site of a meeting in 1961 between President John F. Kennedy and Nikita S. Khrushchev, then the Soviet leader.

In the informal debate among key senators, the majority leader, Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, speaking on the floor, said the Senate had "an awesome responsibility" in taking up ratification because the treaty went "to the very heart of United States national security interests."

Church Sees 'Most Crucial Issue'

Frank Church, Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, said in a Washington speech that the formal debate "will be one of the most crucial issues on which the Senate will render judgment in this century."

Most senators, particularly those in leadership position, avoided committing themselves publicly on the treaty. Officials said 40 were leaning toward approval, 20 against and 40 seemed undecided. Sixty-seven votes are needed for ratification.

The United States announced yesterday that basic agreement had been reached after years of negotiation. The Soviet Union, which was silent on the Washington announcement yesterday, reported it today without comment. The first word on the timing of the Carter-Brezhnev meeting came from Rosalynn Carter in Rome, where she told Italian officials that the signing would be on June 15.

President Carter seemed emotional about the pact at a breakfast meeting with the American Retail Federation. He said:

"I have only one life to live on this

earth, as you have. I think the most important single achievement that could possibly take place for our nation during my lifetime is the ratification of the SALT treaty that we have just negotiated with the Soviet Union.

"Rejection of this treaty, now that it has been negotiated, would be a devastating blow to the United States of America and to the Soviet Union. It would harm our nation's security and it would be a massive destructive blow to world peace."

If the treaty was rejected, he said, "we would be looked upon as a warmonger, not as a peace-loving nation, by many other people of the world."

The President said that, if the pact was not ratified, other nations, such as Pakistan, India, Taiwan, South Korea, South Africa, Argentina and Brazil, would be more likely to develop nuclear weapons.

Mr. Carter said these countries would ask: "Why should we listen to the voice of the United States encouraging us not to develop nuclear weapons when they themselves will not approve a treaty designed for the same purpose?"

Byrd's Two Basic Questions

Senator Byrd said he had taken no position on the treaty and, in deciding how to vote, would be seeking to answer "two very basic questions."

"First, what would be the net effect of the treaty on the strategic balance and on United States national security," he said. "Secondly, can the agreement be adequately verified? And when I say adequate, I don't mean barely-satisfactorily or sufficient, I mean fully satisfactory and sufficient, satisfactory to me and to those who are experts in this critical area."

He said that he and his associates believe they have an agreement "that is sound and merits the confidence of the Senate and the American people." It is now up to the Senate to determine whether that is so, he said.

Mr. Byrd followed essentially the same political course during the debate over ratification of the Panama Canal treaties last year. He did not take a position until near the end of the debate when he supported them. Administration officials expect that he will exert influence for approval when the vote nears.

Baker to Consult With Carter

The Republican leader, Howard H. Baker Jr. of Tennessee, who has said he was "leaning against" the treaty, told the Senate that he would avoid partisan politics and would be in close touch with President Carter during the debate.

Senator Church, speaking to the International Research and Exchanges Board, a group sponsoring East-West exchanges of scholars, said that the formal debate in the Senate should be guided by "principles based on reason."

"To be sure, we must face hard questions," the Idaho Democrat said. "Does the treaty serve the security interests of the United States? Is it evenly balanced? Is it verifiable? What consequences are likely to flow from ratification or from rejection?"

While Senator Church avoided saying favor of the treaty. For instance, in talk-

ing about the need to slow the arms race, he said the treaty "appears to move genuinely in this direction; it is not a giant step, but it is a significant step."

Not a Plebiscite on Soviet Union

He said the treaty should be judged on its merits "and not be used as a referendum on the character of the Soviet Union or as a plebiscite on Soviet behavior in the third world."

"The question must be, does the treaty serve American interests?" he said. "If it does, then it should be approved, without linkage to other issues. If it does not, then it should be rejected."

He said the Senate had to weigh not only the advantages of the treaty, but also "the consequences of rejection, whether it be by direct nay vote, or by way of adopting fatal reservations."

"Détente would lie like broken pottery on the floor" if the treaty was not approved, he said.

"We would lose the opportunity to influence the Soviet Union, to choose courses that reflect our mutual interests in stability and the avoidance of conflict," he added.

In preparation for the Carter-Brezhnev meeting, officials said they hoped to re-establish the principle of yearly high-level contacts with the Soviet Union.

President Richard M. Nixon held three successive meetings with Mr. Brezhnev in 1972, 1973, and 1974; and President Gerald R. Ford met with Mr. Brezhnev in Vladivostok in late 1974 and at Helsinki in August 1975. This will be Mr. Carter's first such meeting.

Because of Mr. Brezhnev's health, he is no longer viewed by American officials as able to hold wide-ranging conversations and therefore they expect the talks with Mr. Carter to be more of a symbolic session in which major issues will probably be discussed on the sidelines by Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance and Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko.